A Study of Work Ethics across Generations in Hong Kong – from Baby Boomers to Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of quiet quitting, or "tang ping", has been observed in organizations in many societies, commonly amongst younger employees, which poses questions to employee's work ethic. A study of 301 employees in Hong Kong across Baby boomers, Generations X, Y and Z found no statistically significant differences in the overall MWEP score and the seven core dimensions between these generations. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive association of age with "Centrality of work" and "Wasted time" dimensions, and the p-values for "Centrality of Work" and "Leisure" dimensions in Kruskal-Wallis test were approaching significance. These suggested that while there might be more continuity than differences in work ethics across generations, HR practitioners should remain vigilant of any potential differences in the work mentalities of employees from different generations and adopt appropriate measures to promote engagement and performance of their multigenerational workforce.

Keywords: *Work ethics; MWEP; Generation; Difference; Hong Kong; Quiet quitting.*

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, the momentum of quiet quitting has swept across the world, especially after the the pandemic of 2019. Employees opted for work with basic pay and achievable duties so they could be free from unnecessary pressure and responsibilities (Lewis, 2023). They were less willing to commit additional efforts into excelling at or improving their work, and they suppressed their ambitions and desires in exchange for a stress-free lifestyle. This relatively laid-back mentality was described as "tang ping" in Chinese, which literally means just lying flat.

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The government of China had been criticizing such anti-work and passive mentalities, and accusing those embracing "tang ping" mentality for being disgraceful in the poor work ethic they developed. In the West, according to a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management in August 2022, over 70 percent of HR practitioners reported that they have noticed quiet quiting among younger workers (Alonso, 2022). More than half of the HR professionals considered quiet quitting to be a real concern and a "new workplace problem" within organizations. The current article therefore attempts to understand if work ethic has deteriorated in younger generations as compared to the older ones, and to reveal any differences in terms of the employees' work mentalities across generations from Baby boomers to Generation Z. This article starts with general background of work ethic, followed by a review of work ethic studies which targeted at difference generations before delivering the research method, results and discussions, and finally suggesting implications for HR practitioners.

2.0 Work Ethics

Work ethics are the attitudes, beliefs and values held by individuals during work, which are multidimensional and reflective of how individuals act and behave at workplace (Meriac *et al.*, 2010; Miller *et al.*, 2002). Work ethics were originally devised by post-reformation scholars, who promoted individualism among society and discredited the welfare state. The scholars believed that individuals should be liable for their own well-beings in life and it is through hard work that an individual could better the standard of living. Individuals with high work ethics should dedicate and commit to work, and be willing to exercise effort over and above the threshold requirements and expectations of their jobs (McMurray & Scott, 2013). In the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) developed by Miller *et al*. (2002), work ethics could be evaluated across seven distinctive dimensions, namely centrality of work, delay of gratification, hard work, leisure, morality/ethics, self-reliance and wasted time.

Centrality of work was defined as a "belief in work for work's sake" (Miller *et al.*, 2002) and may be described as the relative importance of work in comparison with an individual's other interests in life (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021). Individuals with high centrality of work would be highly committed to their work and would devise plans in their personal lives around their work so to ensure that their personal lives and wealth would not interfere with work schedules and their desire for lifelong working.

Delay of gratification referred to an individual's disposition towards postponed enjoyment or later rewards (Miller *et al.*, 2002), which enables an individual to sacrifice immediate rewards in exchange for achievement of long term goals (van der Walt *et al.*,

2016). Individuals associated strongly with delay of gratification would be willing to believe in the future, continue their work without short-term incentives and tolerantly persevere for a long term before enjoying all the returns in distant future.

Hard work was defined as "the belief in the virtues of hard work" (Miller *et al.*, 2002) and may be understood as an individual's faith in becoming an ideal person of success through high concentration and involvement in work (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021; van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). Hard workers trust that they would be able to achieve success and reach their goals if they faithfully concentrate and be actively involved in their work.

Leisure referred to the "pro-leisure attitudes and beliefs in the importance of non-work activities" (Miller *et al.*, 2002), which for instance would be allocating time for recreation and relaxation. Individuals who enjoy leisure were assumed to have engaged in more non-work activities and pampered themselves with activities and entertainments which were more related to personal lives and pleasure rather than work (van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). Morality/ethics was defined as the belief "in a just and moral existence" (Miller *et al.*, 2002) and, despite its possible categorization to two constructs, had been adopted interchangeably to describe the principle values an individual holds when acting and behaving fairly and righteously at work (van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). Rather than referring to a broad nature of morality or ethical values, this dimension under MWEP appeared to focus primarily on fairness and equality justice. Individuals who were associated with high morality/ethics usually treat others fairly and equally, and vice versa also expect to be treated in similar manner.

Self-reliance was described as "striving for independence in one's daily work" (Miller *et al.*, 2002), which required an individual to rely on oneself and refrain from overly depending on others. It may be understood as an expectation of an individual taking care of one's work without constant need of guidance from and supervision by others (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021). Self-reliant individuals would consider working independently as a factor for success and be committed to equip oneself with the capabilities and mentalities for autonomous work and decision making as far as possible.

Wasted time referred to the attitudes towards "active and productive use of time" (Miller *et al.*, 2002) with an inclination towards utilizing time efficiently and productively at work to avoid unnecessary wasting of time (van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). Individuals who were observant with wasted time would be more cautious with efficient use of their time on work and production, and would less likely allocate their time in unproductive workplace activities such as browsing mobile phones, playing pranks on colleagues or daydreaming or fantasizing (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

3.0 Cross Generational Studies

Generation describes "a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related age groups embedded in a historical-social process" (Mannheim & Kecskemeti, 1952). Individuals belonging to the same generation would have experienced same social and cultural events in the same environment thereby shaping the way they think and act. Generation shifts from one to another when individuals encountered radical "fresh contacts" bearing imminent significance forcing them to change the way they think and act from what had been referenced to their predecessors to a new conscious. Underpinning the theory of generation, researchers argued that individuals belonging to different generational cohorts might be exposed to different social and cultural influences which affected their behaviours and values, and ultimately formed distinguishable attributes, characteristics and traits at work (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Researches in the early 21st century reverts around three prominent generational cohorts, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y (Millennials).

Twenge *et al.* (2010) reviewed empirical evidences of generational differences in researches across the first decade of the 21st century. In general, the Baby Boomers were found to possess higher work centrality and overall work ethics than the Generations X and Y. The Baby Boomers believed work to be an important part of life and would tend to continue working even if they had earned enough money. The Baby Boomers also valued leisure less as compared to the younger Generations X and Y respondents who preferred to work slower and take up jobs offering more vacations.

A cross-sectional research in South Africa in 2014 had recruited 301 participants crossing three different generational cohorts – Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y – and also revealed statistically significant differences in the hard work and delay of gratification dimensions among different cohorts (van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). In particular, the younger Generation Y reporting lower scores in their perception of importance of hard work and their tolerance for delayed gratification as compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. The differences between other dimensions of work ethics were, however, not statistically significant across generations.

Researches in the recent years have extended to study the younger Generation Z beyond the Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y. A study in Ecuador comprising of 624 respondents across four different generational cohorts – Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y and Z – found significant differences in certain facets of their work ethics (Zúñiga Ortega *et al.*, 2019). Older Baby Boomers and Generation X respondents tended to share stronger belief in the centrality of work and more lenient acceptance of wasted time at workplace when compared to the younger Generations Y and Z. The younger Generation Z also

displayed stronger disposition of delay gratification than their predecessors Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y respondents. There was, however, an absence of significant differences in the other facets of work ethics – hard work, leisure, morality/ethics and self-reliance.

Another survey study of 81 individuals aging across 18 to 65 was conducted to investigate the generational differences of three designated dimensions of work ethics – hard work, centrality of work and wasted time (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021). The analysis similarly showed greater work centrality among the older Baby Boomers and Generation X as compared to the younger Generations Y and Z. These older generations also reported higher scores in their belief in the importance of hard work.

A more recent study at the United States engaged 131 participants and examined the differences in work ethics specifically between Baby Boomers and Generation Z, and found that the generational effect among the studied samples was statistically significant (Seifert *et al.*, 2023). The older Baby Boomers reported higher values in self-reliance, morality/ethics, hard work, centrality of work and wasted time dimensions as compared to the younger Generation Z, and their differences were along the medium to large effect size range. The delay of gratification and leisure dimensions were not reported due to the sub-optimal reliability of the measurement of the former dimension and the deviation of expected direction of effect of the latter dimension.

There appeared to be some evidences of statistically significant differences in overall work ethics or certain dimensions of work ethics under the MWEP across generational cohorts. However, the reported findings had been mixed, with some demonstrated strong significance in the generation effect over the differences in work ethics, whereas some identified the dimensions with notable difference between two or more generational cohorts in absence of strong statistical significance. More research studies covering samples from different countries and engaging larger sample sizes would likely be useful to further verify the existence of differences in overall work ethics or isolated work ethics dimensions across generational cohorts.

4.0 Research Objectives

Acknowledging that research findings in generational differences of MWEP had not been consistent, most studies agreed that there was generational difference in the centrality of work dimension of work ethics. The younger generations tended to possess weaker belief in work centrality as compared to older generations, and this generational difference had been reported in researches in different countries. Nevertheless, studies of

cross-generational effect on work ethics had been uncommon in Asia in recent years. This article therefore aims to engage samples from an Asian international city – Hong Kong – to examine if differences in overall work ethics or selected dimensions of work ethics exist across generational cohorts with local respondents.

As there are differences in historical events in different countries or locations, many studies have noted that the demarcation of the generational span might not be consistent across countries or locations (van der Walt *et al.*, 2016). As Hong Kong has been a British colony before 1997, the locals' awareness of and exposure to historical events should be similar to those of the West. With reference to a research report by local consultancy firm (Apex Institute, 2018; Wong, 2018), the study in this article adopted the following generational demarcation – Baby Boomers (born in or before 1965), Generation X (born in 1966-1980), Generation Y (born in 1981-1995) and Generation Z (born in or after 1996).

5.0 Research Method

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this study to collect self-reported qualitative ratings of work ethics from participants across four different generational cohorts. This method had been employed in various studies previously reviewed (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021; Seifert *et al.*, 2023; van der Walt *et al.*, 2016; Zúñiga Ortega *et al.*, 2019) owing to its cost effectiveness for empirical research purposes. The 65-item MWEP questionnaire (Miller *et al.*, 2002) was applied as the survey questions in the current study and respondents were asked to rate with the Likert scale between 1 and 5. There were 10 items measuring the self-reliance, morality/ethics, leisure, hard work and centrality of work dimensions, 8 items measuring the wasted time dimension and 7 items measuring the delay of gratification dimension. The leisure items had been reverse input due to its negative correlation in the MWEP design. The overall work ethic scores were calculated by adding individual means of the response for each dimension multiplied by 10 in order to ensure that all dimensions were scaled equally. The coefficient alphas of individual dimensional measures in this study ranged from 0.640 to 0.872, which indicated acceptable to good reliabilities.

Local part-time students from various faculties of a tertiary educational institution in Hong Kong were invited to participate in the survey. These part-time students were employed either full-time or part-time in different industries, and aged across different generational cohorts, were given to understand that their participation in the survey study was fully voluntary and anonymous, and any data collected would be strictly used for academic research purposes. Participants were also explained that should they wish to their

withdrawal was permitted at any stage of the study before the findings were submitted for consideration by academic publication entities.

Designed as an electronic form, the survey was accessible by common digital devices such as mobile smartphones, tablets or laptop computers via scanning the survey QR code so that participants' convenience and overall experience could be enhanced. Respondents' basic demographic information, their birth years and their ratings to the 65 items in the MWEP questionnaire had been collected through the electronic survey. The data collection period spanned over three months, and by its end 307 responses were obtained with 6 rejected due to incompletion or duplication. In other words, 301 collected responses were formally put through to the analysis stage.

6.0 Results

As generational cohorts are neither consistent in their span nor demarcations, Pearson correlation analysis has been conducted on a closely related demographic construct – age – which is a ratio scale – to see if the overall work ethics or its subsidiary dimensions would be associated with changes in age. Although table 1 shows no statistically significant correlation between age and overall work ethics, the Centrality of Work ($r = 0.131$) and Wasted Time ($r = 0.122$) dimensions exhibited significant positive correlations with age. This suggests that older respondents tend to have stronger belief in work being a central part of their lives and in the productive use of time for work.

Table 1: Internal Consistency and Pearson Correlation Analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha	Pearson Correlation with Age
Centrality of Work	0.660	.131*
Delay of Gratification	0.640	.016
Hard Work	0.872	-.071
Leisure	0.852	.062
Morality/Ethics	0.746	-.020
Self-Reliance	0.849	.070
Wasted Time	0.767	.122*
MWEP		.065
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		

Source: Authors own creation based on data analysis.

Similar observations in the directional differences of the Centrality of Work and Wasted Time dimensions across generational cohorts are found in the descriptive statistical analysis of work ethics. Table 2 shows a summary of the results of the descriptive statistical analysis. The older Baby Boomers (3.72) reported the highest Centrality of Work scores, followed by the younger Generations X (3.55) and Y (3.55), and the youngest Generation Z (3.45) reported the lowest Centrality of Work scores among the four generational cohorts studied. The old Baby Boomers (3.80) also reported the highest Wasted Time scores, followed by younger Generations X (3.73) and Y (3.67), and the youngest Generation Z (3.58) reported the lowest Wasted Time scores. However, no clear directional differences were noted in the overall work ethics scores and the other dimensions of work ethics.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Work Ethics by Generational Cohorts

Generation	N	%	Centrality of Work	Delay of Gratification	Hard Work	Leisure	Morality/ Ethics	Self-Reliance	Wasted Time	MWEP
Baby Boomers	37	12.3%	3.72	3.60	3.43	2.40	4.18	4.02	3.80	251.54
Gen X	105	34.9%	3.55	3.68	3.57	2.54	4.30	3.89	3.73	252.46
Gen Y	126	41.9%	3.55	3.60	3.63	2.43	4.32	3.93	3.67	251.33
Gen Z	33	11.0%	3.45	3.68	3.58	2.24	4.21	3.83	3.58	245.78
	301		3.56	3.64	3.58	2.44	4.29	3.92	3.69	251.14

Source: Authors own creation based on data analysis.

To examine if there are statistically significant differences of work ethics across generational cohorts, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) has been performed. Despite the assumption of homogenous variance-covariance matrices was satisfied, the Levene's test of the dataset revealed a violation of the homogeneity of variance for the Hard Work dimension, therefore this study has applied a nonparametric statistical analysis – the Kruskal-Wallis Test – to continue the examination of differences of work ethics across generations. Table 3 shows the results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test. None of the p-values is below 0.05, which means that there was no statistically significant differences of the overall work ethics ($p = 0.447$) nor the individual work ethic dimensions between generational cohorts at the 0.05 level. Nevertheless, the p-values of the Centrality of Work ($p = 0.085$) and Leisure ($p = 0.088$) dimensions are approaching to the 0.05 level of significance, which suggest that there might still be meaningful generational effects over these two specific work ethics dimensions.

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test (Grouping Variable: Generation)

	Centrality of Work	Delay of Gratification	Hard Work	Leisure	Morality/ Ethics	Self-Reliance	Wasted Time	MWEP
Kruskal-Wallis H	6.621	0.706	1.807	6.548	4.610	2.335	1.704	2.659
df	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.085	0.872	0.613	0.088	0.203	0.506	0.636	0.447

Source: Authors own creation based on data analysis

7.0 Discussions

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the work ethics across four distinct generational cohorts, suggesting a more complex relationship between generations and work ethics that might include both continuities and subtle shifts. The discussions have been written under three subtitles to provide a clearer presentation.

7.1 Absence of statistical differences of work ethics across generations

One of the key findings of this study is that there are no statistically significant differences in overall work ethics across the four generational cohorts. This is evident from the Kruskal-Wallis test on the overall MWEP scores, which yields a p-value of 0.447. Such a result suggests that, while mean scores differ slightly, generational distinctions in work ethics are not statistically significant. Baby Boomers, for example, report slightly higher average work ethics scores compared to younger groups, but the small magnitude of these differences means they are less likely to be of practical importance.

This finding stands in contrast to some widely held assumptions that younger generations, particularly the Generations Y and Z, display weaker work ethics (Deal *et al.*, 2010; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). There is a prevalent belief that these younger groups are less inclined toward long-term commitment, responsibility, and hard work. A generational culture has often been framed to portray them as more focused on personal fulfilment and leisure (King, 2004; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). However, this study suggests that these assumptions may be exaggerated, if not outright incorrect. The data implies that fundamental values tied to work ethics such as responsibility, diligence, and perseverance might be widely shared across generations (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

Indeed, the absence of significant generational differences in work ethics may reflect broader societal and economic shifts that have influenced all generations (Arsenault, 2004; Costanza *et al.*, 2012). For instance, economic challenges such as job insecurity, the rise of gig work, and global financial crises have impacted both older and

younger generations, possibly reinforcing the importance of hard work and financial stability through life-long working across the board (Benson & Brown, 2011; Lent & Brown, 2013). Moreover, it is possible that workplace values like punctuality, dedication, and productivity, which are typically tied to work ethics and shaped by longstanding professional norms and expectations, remain resilient across generational divides (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). The quieting quitting phenomenon might well be a more pervasive problem in all generational cohorts than what had been commonly attributed to originating from only the younger generations (Smith & Nichols, 2015).

This findings points to the importance of avoiding overly simplistic generational stereotypes (Deal *et al.*, 2010; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). Rather than viewing younger workers as fundamentally different from their older counterparts in terms of commitment or responsibility, there might be structural and environmental factors that shape work ethics and behaviours (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011). For example, Baby Boomers and Generation X employees may have had access to more stable long-term employment options during their early careers, while Generations Y and Z face more precarious job markets which influence their attitudes and values toward work (Ng & Johnson, 2015). These economic realities might affect how each generation expresses their work ethics, but some core values might also remain consistent and continual across generations (DeVaney, 2015; Ertas, 2015).

7.2 Potential differences in centrality of work, wasted time and leisure dimensions across generations

Although there are no statistically significant differences in overall work ethics across the generations, some dimensions under the MWEP – notably the dimensions of Centrality of Work, Wasted Time, and Leisure – demonstrate differences that would potentially provide understanding into the changing attitudes toward work and time management between generational cohorts.

Baby Boomers score highest in the Centrality of Work dimension in the studied sample, while Generation Z scores the lowest. Despite the Kruskal-Wallis test result is not statistically significant, it approaches the threshold of significance and suggests that older generations might attach greater importance to work as a defining aspect of their identity compared to younger generations (Deal *et al.*, 2010; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

The higher scores among the older Baby Boomers may reflect the work-centric culture they experienced during their formative years, when professional success was often seen as a critical component of personal identity and fulfilment (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007; Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008). During the mid-to-late 20th century, career advancement and financial stability through life-long working were viewed as the cornerstones of

success (Gursoy *et al.*, 2013; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Baby Boomers' strong attachment to the centrality of work aligns with earlier research, which has suggested that older workers are more likely to view their work as a key part of their personal purpose (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017).

In contrast, Generation Z scores lower on the Centrality of Work dimension, which might indicate a shift in perspective (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Research on Generation Z often suggests that they are more likely to seek out careers that offer flexibility, personal fulfilment, and work-life balance (Costanza *et al.*, 2012). Unlike Baby Boomers, who may have been more willing to sacrifice personal time for professional achievement, Generation Z workers are more inclined to integrate work with their broader life goals, often placing greater emphasis on personal well-being and social values (Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008).

This generational shift could reflect broader societal changes, including the rise of the gig economy, remote work, and a growing emphasis on mental health and balanced work life (Benson & Brown, 2011; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017). Another dimension showing potential generational differences is Wasted Time, in which Baby Boomers score the highest followed by the younger generations. While the Kruskal-Wallis test result for this dimension is also not statistically significant, the differences in mean scores suggest that older generations might be more concerned about making efficient use of their time at work (Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008).

Such stronger aversion to wasted time might be linked to cultural norms that emphasized productivity, efficiency, and maximizing work output during the mid-to-late 20th century (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Baby Boomers, in particular, entered the workforce during the era when corporate cultures promoted long hours and a relentless focus on getting things done, reflecting broader societal expectations of hard work and diligence (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008). The idea of wasting time could be viewed as a serious breach of work ethics, contributing to the higher scores seen among Baby Boomers in this study.

Younger generations might alternatively view time management with a different scope. Generation Z, for instance, may prioritize outcomes over time spent on tasks, reflecting a growing trend toward flexibility and results-oriented work environments. The shift from traditional office-based work to remote or hybrid work models, which became more widespread during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, has allowed for greater autonomy in how employees structure their time (Benson & Brown, 2011). This could help explain why technology savvy Generation Z reported relatively lower scores on Wasted Time, as they might be more comfortable in utilizing technologies and the

changing work models to achieve results in a less structured and more efficient manner, rather than adhering to the rigid time management practices of traditional office hours (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017).

The dimension of Leisure also appears to display generational differences. Similar to the Centrality of Work dimension, the Kruskal-Wallis test result of the Leisure dimension suggests that while this trend is not statistically significant, it reflects a possible generational shift of the perception on Leisure (DeVaney, 2015; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). The older Baby Boomers and Generation X show less inclination toward prioritizing leisure, which aligns with their higher Centrality of Work scores (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).

The youngest Generation Z in contract focuses relatively highly on leisure which could be interpreted as part of their broader pursuit of work-life balance. While the older generations were often willing to put in long hours for career advancement, younger workers increasingly view personal fulfilment and time outside of work as integral to success. This generational shift could also be tied to changing attitudes about well-being, mental health, and the importance of avoiding burnout (Lewis, 2023). The growing discourse around self-care and the normalization of work-life balance as a professional expectation might explain why Generation Z places more value on leisure than older generations.

7.3 Low overall work ethics scores among Generation Z employees

This study does not reveal statistically significant generational differences in overall work ethic, nevertheless the younger Generation Z consistently reports lower scores across several dimensions compared to the older Baby Boomers and Generation X (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Ertas, 2015). For instance, Generation Z has the lowest mean scores on Centrality of Work (3.45) and Wasted Time (3.58). These differences might not have been substantial enough to reach statistical significance, yet they might suggest a shift in how younger workers approach work (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Generation Z's lower work ethics scores might be a reflection of the broader societal context in which they have grown up.

Unlike Baby Boomers, who came of age during a period of economic growth and job security, most Generation Z has entered the workforce during a time of rapid technological change, economic instability, and a global pandemic (Alonso, 2022; Lewis, 2023; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007; Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008). These factors could have shaped their attitudes toward work in unique ways to prioritize flexibility, meaningful work, and work-life integration over the traditional markers of career success, such as job stability and long-term commitment (Benson & Brown, 2011; Cennamo & Gardner,

2008). Generation Z's lower scores on the work ethics dimensions traditionally valued by older generations such as Centrality of Work and Wasted Time might reflect their more holistic approach to life, where work is just one component of personal fulfilment rather than the primary source and that they prioritize both fulfilment and well-being alongside professional success in career (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017; Smith & Nichols, 2015).

This generational shift is also supported by the Pearson correlation analysis, which shows weak but significant positive correlations between age and Centrality of Work ($r = 1.31$, $p < 0.05$) and between age and Wasted Time ($r = 0.122$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that older individuals place greater importance on work and are more concerned with time management and efficiency than younger people. This is particularly consistent with Generation Z's broader emphasis on well-being and quality of life, indicating that they are less likely to view work as the sole measure of success or happiness (DeVaney, 2015; Smith & Nichols, 2015) and are more likely to purposefully find time for relaxation and personal interests outside work (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017).

8.0 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study show the complexity of the relationships between generational cohorts and work ethics, suggesting more continuity statistically than sharp differences. Despite so, HR practitioners may still draw insights from the results and discussions to design suitable strategies to cater to the needs of the multigenerational workforce. Noting that the findings imply more shared fundamental values among workers from different generational cohorts which are likely shaped by broader societal and economic conditions rather than generational characteristics, HR practitioners may adopt management approaches with individualized lens instead of over-reliance on generational labels where the work behaviours and attitudes of employees could have been oversimplified or misrepresented(Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Deal *et al.*, 2010; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017).

Performance evaluations, developmental plans and engagement strategies should be based on an understanding of employees' personal experiences, career aspirations and situational challenges, rather than defaulting to assumptions based on their age groups (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Kuron *et al.*, 2015). For example, a Baby Boomer employee might value flexibility in retirement planning, while a Generation Z worker might prioritize opportunities for personal growth and learning. HR teams should cultivate a flexible approach to employee management that transcends generational divides, focusing instead on individual motivations, preferences, and work styles, which can help avoid

unnecessary generational tension and support a more inclusive workplace (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008).

Another notable trends that emerged from this study is that younger generations, particularly Generation Z, are more focused on achieving work-life balance and would likely to prioritize personal well-being and seek flexibility in their careers or integration of their careers with personal fulfilment and leisure. To attract and retain younger generation employees, HR practitioners may need to consider offering more flexible work arrangements, including options for remote work, flexible hours, and part-time schedules (Cahill & Sedrak, 2012; Ng *et al.*, 2010; Schullery, 2013; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). A results-oriented culture, where the focus is on outputs and outcomes rather than time spent in the office, will resonate with younger employees who may not adhere to traditional norms of work structure (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Sullivan *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, providing wellness programmes that promote mental health, personal development and work-life integration, such as gym memberships, mental health days, meditation or stress relief workshops and access to counselling services, can enhance engagement and productivity (Anderson *et al.*, 2017). HR professionals may also consider expanding their benefits packages to include flexibility for employees to manage personal obligations, such as caregiving, which can further reinforce an employer's commitment to work-life balance to create a more appealing work environment for the younger generations Y and Z while also supporting the overall well-being of their workforce (Ng *et al.*, 2010; Schullery, 2013).

To further illustrate on the proposed results-oriented culture, it is important for HR practitioners to recognize that younger generations potentially perceive the concept of Wasted Time in a much looser manner and are more familiar with fluid work environments which are prioritized over results instead of strict adherence to time-based work models (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). HR practitioners need to rethink and revise traditional performance metrics that focus on hours worked or time spent on tasks, and consider adopting performance evaluation models that prioritize results, outcomes, and overall contributions to team or company goals (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Ng & Johnson, 2015). For instance, HR teams could introduce assessments that evaluate employees based on their ability to complete tasks effectively and efficiently, regardless of how much time was spent (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010).

This approach aligns with the values of younger generations Y and Z, and would foster a more appreciative culture which values trust and autonomy, where employees are given the freedom to manage their time and responsibilities while promising engagement and performance (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). HR practitioners should train managers and supervisors to move away from micromanagement and instead

focus on coaching and supporting employees in achieving their goals, which in return also benefit the overall organization by increasing innovation and adaptability (Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017).

In addition to a potential difference in perception of Wasted Time, the younger generations also report lower scores on Centrality of Work suggesting a weaker belief in work being the primary source of fulfilment, identity and purpose. This shift necessitates a rethinking of traditional career development programs that focus on long-term stability and hierarchical advancement (Kuron *et al.*, 2015). HR professionals must design career pathways that reflect the changing aspirations of the workforce, particularly for younger employees who may prioritize personal growth, diverse experiences, and opportunities to make an impact over job security or conventional promotions (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

To effectively engage younger generations, HR practitioners should provide diverse career development opportunities that allow for non-linear career trajectories (Ng & Johnson, 2015). This could include rotational programmes, opportunities for lateral moves and career sabbaticals. Mentorship and continuous learning opportunities should also be emphasized, with an emphasis on helping employees develop a broad skill set that aligns with their personal and professional goals (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Additionally, HR professionals should consider offering individualized career coaching, helping younger employees identify their strengths and map out personalized career paths that align with their values and aspirations (Anderson *et al.*, 2017; Ng *et al.*, 2010). Organizations could also provide platforms for younger workers to contribute to projects with social impact, as this aligns with their desire for meaningful work (Lyons *et al.*, 2012; Wong, M. *et al.*, 2008). By recognizing that younger generations are seeking flexibility and purpose, organizations can create initiatives and programmes that not only retain but also inspire the next generation of talents.

Finally, acknowledging the existence of some potential differences across generational cohorts while bearing in mind there are statistically broader similarities and continuity in attitudes and values held by the multigenerational workforce which coexist under the same roofs within their organizations, HR practitioners need to design engagement strategies that resonate with the evolving values and, at the same time, promote the collaborations between employees of different generations (Zúñiga Ortega *et al.*, 2019). To address the need for greater harmony and collaboration in a multigenerational workforce, organizations must create work environments that foster respect and teamwork across generational lines (Deal *et al.*, 2010; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). While differences in attitudes and preferences do potentially exist, the shared values that

employees hold, regardless of their age, can serve as a foundation for promoting unity (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017).

Implementation of mentorship programmes that offer opportunities for two-way learning between employees of older and younger generations may encourage the exchange of knowledge and mutual respect and appreciation (Ng *et al.*, 2010). Formation of multigenerational project teams can also promote collaboration between employees of different age groups. These teams should be designed with clear, shared goals to ensure all contributions are valued equally, regardless of the employee's age or tenure (Cahill & Sedrak, 2012; Lyons *et al.*, 2012). The diversity of thought can lead to more innovative solutions and can help reduce generational divides within the organization. HR professionals may also take further steps to reward collaborative shared success by creating recognition programmes to highlight achievements and contributions of members of multigenerational project teams (Gursoy *et al.*, 2013; Schullery, 2013; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). Eventually, an organizational culture that is more inclusive and appreciative to diversities among employees of different generational cohorts may be shaped so that everyone feels they are respected and valued, and every employee is motivated to contribute and succeed in their careers and lives.

9.0 Limitations and future research

There are several limitations in this study, so readers should be mindful when interpreting the findings. First, the study is limited by the size of its sample and the use of non-probability sampling technique, so the external validity and the generalizability of its results would be constrained. Secondly, the adoption of self-reported MWEP survey may be subject to respondents' biasness, such as the tendency to respond with socially desirable value or possibility of primacy and recency effects, which potentially limits the construct validity. Thirdly, as Meriac, et al (2010) noted, respondents from different generational cohorts may comprehend the survey items differently; for instance, older generation considers working long days as hard work, whereas younger generation thinks that being good team players who bring everything together is representative of hard work (Bertsch *et al.*, 2021). Such discrepancies in comprehension may affect their self-reported scores in the MWEP survey. Finally, the Cronbach's Alphas for the Centrality of Work and Delay of Gratification dimensions are below 0.7 which falls marginally below the commonly recognized level. Future studies should strive to engage larger randomized samples, improve reliability for the Centrality of Work and Delay of Gratification dimensions, and consider the collection of data with more objective tests or tools to minimize self-reporting biases.

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